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June 10, 1974

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National Security Decision Memorandum 256

TO: The Secretary of Defense
 The Director of Central Intelligence
 The Director, Arms Control and
 Disarmament Agency
 The Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission
 The Under Secretary of State for Political
 Affairs

SUBJECT: Nuclear Test Ban Policy

The President has reviewed the results of the NSSM 195 study and subsequent Verification Panel work. On the question of limitations on underground nuclear tests, he has decided that an agreement with the USSR to a threshold ban is acceptable in principle. Such an agreement should meet the following conditions:

-- The threshold test ban should enter into force no earlier than January 1, 1976.

-- PNEs may be allowed only if information adequate for proper verification is furnished by the Soviets. In any event, PNEs must be covered by the same threshold as nuclear weapons tests.

-- The U.S. should oppose the Soviet proposal concerning a quota between an upper and lower threshold.

-- The U.S. can accept a threshold based on yield if adequate geological information is provided by the Soviets and their weapons testing is restricted to specific test sites. The U.S. position is that the threshold must be at least 100 KT.

-- With respect to explosions above the threshold, the U.S. can accept a provision allowing for no more than two unintended and slight breaches of the threshold per year.

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Classified by Henry A. Kissinger

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The President has directed that the Atomic Energy Commission and the Department of Defense develop a nuclear weapons testing program which would complete all essential testing above a 100 KT threshold by January 1, 1976. This program should be submitted for the President's approval by June 19, 1974.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "H. A. Kissinger", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Henry A. Kissinger

cc: The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

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